

Inspire Education Group

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	130613
Name of lead inspector:	Sambit Sen, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	General further education college
Address:	Park Crescent Peterborough Cambridgeshire PE1 4DZ

Interim visit

Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners and apprentices in this period, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

Information about the provider

On 1 August 2020, Peterborough Regional College and New College Stamford merged to form the Inspire Education Group alongside University Centre Peterborough. Through this merger, Peterborough Regional College is now known as Peterborough College, and New College Stamford as Stamford College. The college group provides a wide range of academic and vocational courses. It offers 16 to 19 study programmes to more than 4,600 students. It has more than 1,000 apprentices and 1,400 adult students. The college group has provision for 300 students with high needs.

What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?

Leaders and managers say that in January 2020, they started preparing for the national COVID-19 restrictions. One of their first priorities was to maintain the safety and well-being of staff and students. Since September 2020, they have adopted a blended teaching model for their students. This gives them the flexibility to meet the needs of specific groups of students.

Leaders have invested in information and technology equipment and infrastructure. They have helped lecturers to develop their digital skills through various internal courses. Lecturers say that they collaborate with their peers and sector bodies to adapt their online teaching. For example, performing arts lecturers have linked up with professional dance studios. They have learned how to use video and other specialist software to provide practical online dance lessons.

Leaders and managers have worked closely with employers to provide up-to-date information and guidance. For example, they have helped employers to furlough their apprentices. This has helped reduce the number of apprentices made redundant. Employers help senior leaders to identify and design appropriate curricula for future job opportunities, for example in environmental sciences, to meet local job needs.

Leaders and managers continue to have several ongoing concerns. They are mindful of the need to carefully manage and maintain staff and student motivation. They continue to worry about the potential impact of local and regional COVID-19 restrictions on student recruitment.

Senior leaders collaborate with external stakeholders to help their local communities, for example by working with local secondary schools to provide talks on a wide range of career options to Year 11 students.

What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?

Leaders and managers use different quality improvement strategies to evaluate their curriculum. They regularly survey students and staff to establish improvement priorities. Managers host fortnightly curriculum quality and student experience meetings and termly performance reviews.

Managers recognise that lecturers need to gain confidence in adopting new ways of teaching. They frequently drop into online and classroom sessions to identify and celebrate emerging good practice.

Lecturers say that they use alternative teaching and assessment strategies to cover the curriculum due to current COVID-19 restrictions. For example, early years students use dolls to practise handling babies and making baby feeds. Employers have created video content to explain the experience in childcare settings to these students.

Lecturers have changed the order of subjects, often prioritising theory teaching to suit the curriculum. Hair and beauty lecturers have focused on teaching theory subjects first, for example anatomy and physiology, along with English and mathematics qualifications.

Students say that they enjoy the blended teaching model. They say that they benefit from high-quality online resources created by their lecturers. Students can recap difficult topics by re-visiting the recorded sessions online. Students say that they receive frequent one-to-one help from lecturers and personal tutors and that this helps them to progress in their learning and maintain their mental well-being.

Students continue to receive appropriate careers advice and guidance. Managers organised a virtual week-long higher education open event. This allowed students and their parents to access and evaluate students' higher education options.

How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?

Students say that they feel safe at the college. They know how to keep themselves safe on site and when travelling to college. Students always stay in their course group 'bubbles' and wear face coverings throughout the college. They know whom to approach to discuss issues such as personal anxiety.

Lecturers and personal tutors teach and reinforce e-safety at induction and in tutorials. As a result, students say that they know how to keep themselves safe online. They are aware of the high standards expected of them during online sessions.

Lecturers and managers say that there has been an increase in safeguarding referrals related to fragile mental health, parental neglect and domestic violence. They continue to work with third-party agencies to access appropriate help for students.

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